

**Testimony of James E. Bennett
President and Chief Executive Officer
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On
In-Line Baggage Screening Systems**

**Before the Committee on Government Reform
Of the
United States House of Representatives**

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Chairman Davis, and members of the Committee, on behalf of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, I want to welcome you to Washington Dulles International Airport and thank you for holding this hearing today. I am Jim Bennett, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Authority.

The issue of more effectively and efficiently screening passengers and their baggage through installation of in-line baggage screening systems has been a major industry concern since the passage of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act in November, 2001. It also has been one of the more frustrating experiences in my 25 years in aviation management.

Rarely has there been an issue in the history of the commercial aviation industry which would have such a positive impact on all of the partners which make it up – the Federal Government, airports, airlines, and our collective customers – than the concept of installing in-line baggage screening systems at our nation's major commercial airports; starting right here at both Washington Dulles International and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airports. To make it clear, the current system of screening checked baggage at our two airports – which is solely and exclusively the responsibility of the Federal Government -- is not capable of meeting the current demand, is operationally inefficient, consumes an inordinate amount of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) resources, and is incapable of meeting the projected demand for our airports.

Long before the mandated December 31, 2002 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and TSA requirement that all checked baggage be screened by explosive detection systems (EDS), airport operators across the country – including the Authority – began to wrestle with the logistics, engineering, customer service impacts, and aesthetics of finding the space for the soon-to-be delivered EDS machines. And, from the very first minute of our deliberations, we concluded that the only logical position and most effective location for these machines were to make them an integral part of our existing baggage-handling systems. The Authority, and our industry, made these concerns known long before the arrival of EDS and electronic trace detection (ETD) equipment at our airports. For the record, we have 19 EDS machines and 31 ETD machines at National and 33 EDS and 102 ETD machines here at Dulles.

With the hope that we could avoid the possibility that our ticket counter and concourse areas would become the permanent location of these 185 machines, we immediately commenced design of in-line baggage-screening systems in partnership with the TSA and at significant cost to the Authority for both airports. Concurrently, we also began a dialogue with the TSA to obtain federal funding for them.

The Authority originally applied for a letter of intent (LOI) from the TSA on February 4, 2004 to fund an in-line solution for checked baggage screening at Dulles and Reagan National. Later in the year, in June, I wrote to Admiral David Stone, the former head of the TSA, calling once again for his immediate attention to both of our LOI requests and outlining the tremendous growth and demand underway at Dulles. Admiral Stone replied

to me in September, 2004, noting that “TSA believes that installation of the in-line EDS system at both DCA and IAD is an important project that will enhance security in the Washington Metropolitan area.” The following month, October, we submitted a revised application to TSA to reflect changes in the program due to refinements in the design to accommodate security protocols requested by TSA. We never heard anything back

In the meantime, our airports have continued to grow. In 2005, all-time records for passengers were set at both Dulles and Reagan National Airports. At Dulles, 27 million passengers used the airport and 17.8 million flew in and out of National. As a result of this growth, we began to see the inevitable effects of a very limited baggage-screening system on busy and growing airports – particularly at Dulles. As you might recall, last summer the Washington Post (in a lengthy article dated July 4, 2005) noted that several aircraft were being delayed at Dulles due to the inability of TSA to screen baggage in a timely manner. In meetings I had last summer with Lufthansa, one of the most pressing issues they addressed with me was the issue of baggage screening at Dulles. United Airlines, our largest and most important carrier, has also expressed its concern regarding the baggage screening problem at Dulles.

Also, of great importance to us, is the current state of our terminal buildings at both Reagan National and Dulles. With EDS machines placed throughout our ticketing levels and baggage basements, a quick tour of either airport will demonstrate why the Authority and our airline partners are having an increasingly difficult time properly managing our passenger lines and their baggage. This, in turn, is creating both a customer service issue for all of us and a legitimate security concern. Finally, I find it hard to accept that as the largest aviation system in the world we cannot find the resources to resolve such an obvious problem and enhance this component of our security effort. Getting these machines out of our lobbies and into an integrated baggage handling system will rid us of these concerns while increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of checked baggage screening.

I assure you, Mr. Chairman, that the Authority has not been sitting idly by waiting for TSA to act. We are investing nearly \$8 million, at Authority expense, designing in-line systems that both meet the demands of Dulles and Reagan National for checked baggage screening while improving the security of the aviation system. The estimated cost of constructing in-line baggage screening systems at both Dulles and Reagan National is \$316 million.

Not only will such systems enhance the security of the aviation system, but they will also provide tremendous cost savings to the TSA in the form of reduced labor costs. Our initial estimates for Dulles, based on currently approved TSA security protocols, predict a labor savings of nearly 30 employees per hour during peak hour baggage screening operations. Over time, those labor savings alone should offset a major portion of the investments made in the in-line systems.

Aside from the fact that a process already exists within the TSA to reimburse the Authority’s cost of installing an in-line baggage system at Dulles and Reagan National,

we have extensive experience in working with the Federal Government on similar arrangements. For example, in 2003, we worked with the Federal Aviation Administration on a financing mechanism for the construction of a new Air Traffic Control Tower at Dulles which expedited the project and saved the government money. We expect them to take possession of the tower shortly and commence lease payment on a 20-year, nearly \$50 million project.

Mr. Chairman, I know that the TSA is not satisfied with the current system of screening checked baggage at our nation's airports. However, TSA is somewhat encumbered by federal budgetary restrictions that limit its ability to work with the aviation system on improving this situation. I urge Congress to work with TSA on appropriate legislative reforms necessary to ensure the rapid deployment of checked baggage screening systems.

In conclusion, I simply cannot state it clearly enough. An in-line baggage screening system for our two airports – Dulles and Reagan National – is necessary, affordable, and cost-effective. The Authority is standing at the ready to work with the Department of Homeland Security and Transportation Security Administration to identify appropriate funding and reimbursement mechanisms which will allow us to install this most crucial piece of aviation security infrastructure.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I welcome any questions you may have.